

Starting Off Right

A Quarterly Newsletter from
Healthy Start Coalition of Jefferson,
Madison & Taylor Counties, Inc.

SUMMER 2020



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Health Equity

Health Equity – It Is Achievable



Donna Hagan, MBA

With the current events in our country in mind, I am especially sensitive to how this impacts the work we do at the Healthy Start Coalition to improve maternal and child health. For decades, we have pioneered efforts to promote health equity in our communities, as poor birth outcomes plague our black women three times the rate as white women. We have consistently engaged in best practices for improving community health, including door-to-door canvassing to provide health education, sought additional funding for interventions, provided women's health workshops, and saturated the community with women's health education, all in an effort to reduce the black-white gap in women's health. Our approach has been to improve the health of women before they get pregnant.

The impact of that work over the last few decades has been an increase in health education among all women that reside in Jefferson, Madison and Taylor Counties. Ideally, that empowerment would lead to improved women's health, and improved birth outcomes. And yet our black infant mortality rate for the tri-county area is 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to just 1.9 for whites (rolling avg. 2016-2018). Prematurity rates for the same time period are 12.4% for blacks, compared to 9.3% for white mothers.



While maternal and child health indicators have revealed this gap for decades, so have chronic diseases and other health indicators informed us that our work should be centered on health equity.

Ms. Lisa A. Burnham is a new staff member with the Healthy Start Coalition of JMT. Ms. Burnham will be assisting the coalition with media projects. Ms. Burnham graduated from Saint Leo University's Madison Education Center in 2019 with a Masters of Science in Human Services Administration with a passion of helping others and serving her community. Please send your media ideas to: lburnham@healthystartjmt.org.



Health Equity (Continued from page 1)

If Health Equity is really achievable, then it starts with a community understanding of the Social Determinants of Health. These indicators tell us that where you live, your education and economic status, and access to resources work together to determine health status of individuals. In this framework, all facets of the community have the responsibility to understand how these work, how to improve them, and how to measure that change. The Healthy Start Coalition, along with the Florida Department of Health, are well-versed in the Social Determinants of health and available to train decision makers and advocates of health equity in these counties.

During the fall, the Coalition will be embarking on a strategic planning process to develop real action steps to improve the outcomes you'll find later in this newsletter. We challenge you to be part of that process, and to help us continue to build a Coalition that is dedicated to health equity. To become a member of our strategic planning team, please contact me directly at dhagan@healthystartjmt.org.



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

During normal times, the Coalition would host its annual Pinwheels for Prevention event in the City Park in Perry, Florida. The event brings awareness to Child Abuse Prevention to remind local citizens that child abuse prevention is important in Taylor County. The event, slated for April 18th, was cancelled. Instead, a small pinwheel garden was planted by local Coalition team members. If you or someone you know is facing abuse, please call 1-800-96-ABUSE to get safe and confidential assistance.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Tonya Bell

Tonya Bell attends local baby shower on March 29th to promote women's health and educate families on CDC guidelines around COVID-19.



Angelina Curtis

Healthy Families FAW, Angelina Curtis goes above and beyond to make sure families are fed during the COVID crisis.



MASK UP!

A coordinated effort is underway to distribute cloth masks in the community between the local Health Department and the Healthy Start Coalition - stay tuned!

June is National Children's Awareness Month

During the month of June, organizations provide resources and care through programs to help special needs children excel and feel a sense of normalcy and belonging.



June is National Safety Month

During the month of June, you can help raise awareness through active discussion for preventable injuries and accidents to keep your children safe. Share your ideas on your social media platforms and use the tag: #NationalSafetyMonth.



Needs Assessment Findings

(2016-2018 Rolling Averages)

Infant Mortality

1,000 Live Births compared to Florida: 6.0

-Jefferson: 9.0

-Madison: 10.9

-Taylor: 8.3

Breastfeeding Rates

-Jefferson: 77.0%

-Madison: 68.9%

-Taylor: 69.6%

Smoking Mothers

-Taylor: 19.7% of white mothers smoked 2.5 times greater than black mothers (8.3% of black mothers smoke)

Obesity Rates at Conception

-Jefferson: 36.6%

-Madison: 33.8%

-Taylor: 37.2%

Low Birth Weights (LBW)

-Jefferson: 11.5% (6th highest rate for white LBW at 9%)

-Madison: 16.3% LBW of black babies (compared to 6.1% of white babies)

-Taylor: 8.4% LBW of white babies, compared to 11.8% of black babies (8.7% LBW statewide average)



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As we wrap up our year, I wanted to provide a brief update on the Coalition's response to the COVID-19 crisis and our current status. If you had asked anyone a few short months ago about any changes in our service provision, I would have confidently replied with "of course not". And yet we find ourselves doing business anything but usual in June of 2020.

Immediately, when the threat of the pandemic became obviously imminent, all program staff, including Connect, Healthy Start, and Healthy Families began teleworking by March 23rd, discontinuing face-to-face visits, and providing virtual visits to families on our caseloads. We transitioned our Certified Community Health Educator, Tonya Bell, from outreach assignments to coordinating resources. She called the local stores to ask about toilet paper for 6 consecutive weeks before supplies stabilized. Services to families increased and weekly contacts to families ensure stress management and access to basic supplies ensued. The Coalition stocked up on diapers for needy families and home visitors became the weekly call that all of our families waited for with anticipation week after week.

We quickly learned what worked and didn't by telephone, and use of texting and snail mail entered the daily tasks. What is so incredible about this time period, is that we believe some hybrid of our virtual services is here to stay. Families believe they receive greater benefits including more education through weekly phone contact than less frequent personal encounters. Increased frequency also produced a greater follow-up rate on requests and expedited families receiving referrals and access to other services. Overall, we will be lobbying our funders to ensure some form of virtual visiting remains intact as its benefits have been prove to us over the last few months!

As we gradually resume home visiting and "normal" service delivery, we are acutely aware our version of "normal" has been changed forever. -D. Hagan

